

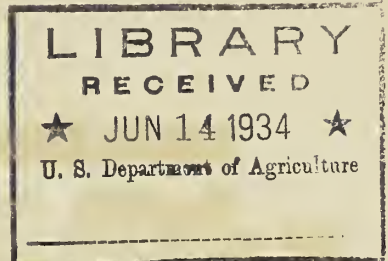
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HOUSEHOLD CALENDAR

Protecting Clothes from Moths



An interview between Miss Ruth Van Deman, Bureau of Home Economics, and Dr. E. A. Back, Bureau of Entomology, delivered in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Hour, broadcast by a network of 50 associate NBC stations, Tuesday, May 29, 1934.

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MR. SALISBURY: Miss Van Deman, I see you have a guest with you today.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Yes, this being the open season for clothes moths we have a guest-entomologist on the Household Calendar today. Not a stranger, but our friend, Dr. E. A. Back, who knows more about the private lives of clothes moths than, -- well, probably than most of us will ever know about our own. But we mustn't waste a second. Doctor Back, if you don't mind, I'll try to be a kind of questioner-in-chief for some eight or ten million women today. We want to protect our furs and woolens from moths this summer. We don't want the moths to rob us of a nickle's worth of our property. But there are so many moth killers, moth repellants, moth-proof cartons, and what-nots, that we don't know which to put our trust in.

DR. BACK: Well, the first step is to get rid of the moth eggs on your woolens and furs before you store them in anything. That is, wash the woolens that are washable in good soapsuds, or if you prefer, have your winter clothes and your blankets dry cleaned. Or if that isn't advisable, at least brush and shake the garments thoroughly out of doors in the sunshine. Turn pockets inside out, and brush under the edges of seams. Clothes, moths are shy, retiring little creatures, and whenever they can, they crawl into out-of-the-way places to lay their eggs.

Then once you get things clean and ready to store, don't let them lie around in the open. Moth millers may fly by at any time and infest them with more eggs. The millers themselves can't eat anything. Their mission in life is to perpetuate their race.

MISS VAN DEMAN: And instinct tells them, I suppose, that their offspring as nice little white worms will find good eating on our soft woolens.

DR. BACK: Exactly.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Dr. Back, I don't know whether you'll think this question is in order or not, but we'd like to know about these cedarized cardboard closets and chests. Are garments stored in them safe against moths?

DR. BACK: Well, these cardboard closets and chests are just about as effective as any kind of a clean box or trunk. Very few of these so-called moth-proof containers are tight enough to keep moths out if they really want to get in. As for the "cedarizing," it doesn't amount to a row of pins in killing moths or even repelling them. But don't misunderstand me, these special moth containers are useful if you don't place too much confidence in them, but just use them for what they are.

(over)

MISS VAN DEMAN: Do you include the tar paper bags in this category also?

DR. BLACK: Yes, except that they're especially useful for the garments that you can store better on hangers. Also it's easy to seal the bags up and make them absolutely moth tight.

MISS VAN DEMAN: I notice you didn't mention real cedar chests and cedar closets in that list. Is there something about them that will actually kill moths?

DR. BACK: Yes, if the chests are properly made. The red heartwood of cedar contains a volatile oil which does kill moths when enough of it gets into the air. So if you have a cedar chest that is made of the red heartwood (in other words, has very little of the whitish sap wood in it), you can consider it a moth-proof container. But even there, I advise you to have every article thoroughly cleaned and brushed before you put it away.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Do you think the average cedar-lined closet built in a house has enough of this heartwood to kill moths?

DR. BACK: No, most of these cedar-lined closets are no better than any other nice clean closet as protectors against moths. But there are chemicals that you can put into any closet that will kill moths.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Now, I suppose you're getting around to naphthalene flakes and this paradichlorobenzene I see in the drugstores. I was going to ask you about them. (My, I hope I never meet that word paradichlorobenzene in a spelling match). Well, is it just as good as naphthalene flakes and vice versa?

DR. BACK: Yes, those seem to be the two best chemicals to use as moth killers around the house. Some people seem to like the odor of paradichlorobenzene better than they do that of flaked naphthalene. Or perhaps I should say they mind it less. You'll find the paradichlorobenzene sold under various trade names such as dichlorocide and paradi. Just be careful to read the label so you know you're getting the real thing.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Tell us, Dr. Back, exactly how to use these chemicals so we'll get the most effect from them. Some people say to scatter them on the woolens and some say to pour them in piles in the trunk or box. How do you find is the best way?

DR. BACK: Well, this is the idea. As naphthalene flakes and paradichlorobenzene crystals evaporate they become a heavier-than air vapor. This vapor is what kills the moths. So we find that it's best to scatter the crystals around through the woolens or furs.

MISS VAN DEMAN: These chemicals, I take it, are perfectly harmless to the fabrics, never leave stains or anything like that.

DR. BACK: Well, they won't if they're high grade chemicals. But sometimes if they are not absolutely pure chemically you might notice on white or very delicate light-colored fabrics slight traces of a sooty deposit. This doesn't happen one time in a hundred. But just to be perfectly safe, I believe it's

better to scatter the crystals between sheets of tissue paper spread between the folds of the clothing. Or put the naphthalene flakes or the paradichlorobenzene crystals in little cheesecloth bags and slip these bags around through the clothes.

MISS VAN DEMAN: How much of the crystals do you allow for a good-sized trunk full of things?

Dr. BACK: Oh, about a pound to a trunk. That's generous, but the cost of the chemicals is so little in comparison with the value of the garments, or blankets, or rugs, that you're trying to protect from damage by moths, that I'd rather overdose and play perfectly safe.

MISS VAN DEMAN: If you were trying to moth-proof a whole closet full of things I suppose you'd recommend using several pounds of the crystals.

DR. BACK: Yes, I would, and if they all evaporated before the summer was over I'd put in some more.

MISS VAN DEMAN: I see. It isn't just the smell of naphthalene or paradichlorobenzene that protects clothes from moths, there must be real vapor.

DR. BACK: That's it.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Well, does that mean that these little gadgets that you fill with the crystals and hang up in your closet are no good?

DR. BACK: No, not all. They're good as long as crystals last and you keep the closet closed. But, of course, closets are not very tight, and the vapors are continually escaping. Hence, you must keep renewing the crystals. As I said before, pack or hang your clean woollens away in good stout containers and scatter through them flaked naphthalene or paradichlorobenzene crystals in folds of tissue paper or little cheesecloth bags. If you do this carefully and well, you can be sure moths won't cause damage through the summer.

MISS VAN DEMAN: You haven't said a word about moth sprays, aren't they any good?

DR. BACK: Yes, some of them are very good if they're properly applied. But they're a whole story in themselves. You'd better not get me started on moth sprays today. Besides there's a lot to be learned yet, I think, before we can recommend this method extensively, so much depends on the way the spray is applied.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Well, thank you, Dr. Back you've certainly cleared up a lot of points for us in this annual fight against moths. I don't suppose you ever find a moth in your own house.

DR. BACK: Well now, Miss Van Deman, that's something about the private lives of clothes moths I'm not going to reveal to anybody.

MISS VAN DEMAN: All right, Dr. Back, we won't press you too far. Thank you a lot for coming over.

Now, if I haven't asked the question about clothes moths uppermost in somebody's mind, I'm sure Dr. Back will be glad to answer your letters.

Goodbye, everybody, for this time.

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